A

Confutation of Atheism

FROM THE

Origine and Frame of the World.

PART I.

A

SERMON

Preached at

St. Mary-le-Bow,

OCTOBER the 3d. 1692.

Being the *Sixth* of the Lecture Founded by the Honourable *ROBERT BOYLE*, Esquire.

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Nov. 10.-92.

Acts XIV. 15, &c.

That ye ſhould turn from theſe vanities unto the living God, who made Heaven and Earth and the Sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times paſt ſuffer'd all Nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheleſs, he left not himſelf without witneſs, in that he did good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitfull Seaſons, filling our hearts with Food and Gladneſs.

ALL the Arguments, that can be brought, or can be demanded, for the Exiſtence of God, may, perhaps not abſurdly, be reduced to three General Heads: The *Firſt* of which will include all the Proofs from the Vital and Intelligent portions of the Univerſe, the Organical Bodies of the various Animals, and the Immaterial Souls of Men. Which Living and Underſtanding Subſtances, as they make incomparably the moſt conſiderable and noble Part of the naturally known and viſible Creation; ſo they do the moſt clearly and cogently demonſtrate to Philoſophical Enquirers the neceſſary Self-exiſtence, and omnipotent Power, and unſearchable Wiſdom, and boundleſs Beneficence of their Maker. This firſt Topick therefore was very fitly and divinely made uſe of by our A-

poſtle in his Conference with Philoſophers and that
Chap. 17. v. 21. inquiſitive People of *Athens*: the latter *ſpending their time in nothing elſe but either to tell or to hear ſome new thing*; and the other to call in queſtion the moſt evident Truths, that were deliver'd and receiv'd of Old. And theſe Arguments we have hitherto purſued in their utmoſt latitude and extent. So that now we ſhall proceed to the *Second* Head, or the Proofs of a Deity from the Inanimate part of the World; ſeeing that even Natural Reaſon, as well
Pſal. 19. 1. as the Holy Scripture, aſſures us, That *the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament ſheweth his*
Jer. 51. 15. *Handy-work*; That *he made the Earth by his power, He hath eſtabliſhed the World by his wiſdom, and hath ſtretch-*
Pſal. 148. 5. *ed out the Heaven by his underſtanding*; That *He commanded and they were created; he hath alſo eſtabliſhed*
147. 8. *them for ever and ever*; *He covereth the Heavens with*
65. 2. *Clouds, He prepareth Rain for the Earth, He crowneth the Year with his Goodneſs.*

Theſe Reaſons for God's Exiſtence, from the Frame and Syſtem of the World, as they are equally true with the Former, ſo they have always been more popular and plauſible to the illiterate part of Mankind; inſomuch as the *Epicureans*, and ſome others, have obſerved, that mens contemplating the moſt ample Arch of the Firmament, the innumerable

Lucret. 5. *Præterea cæli rationes ordine certo, & varia annorum cernebant tempora verti*: & lib. 6. *Nam bene qui didicere Deos ſecurum agere ævum, Si tamen interea mirantur, &c.* Cic.

rable multitude of the Stars, the regular Riſing and Setting of the Sun, the periodical and conſtant Viciſſitudes of Day and Night and Seaſons of the Year, and the other Affections of Meteors and Heavenly Bodies, was the principal and almoſt only ground and occaſion, that the Notion of a God came firſt into the World: making no mention of the former Proof from the Frame of Human Nature, *That in God we Live and Move and have our Being*. Which Argument being ſo natural and intrinſecal to Mankind, doth nevertheleſs (I know not how) ſeem more remote and obſcure to the Generality of Men; who are readier to fetch a Reaſon from the immenſe diſtance of the ſtarry Heavens and the outmoſt Walls of the World, than ſeek one at home, within themſelves, in their own Faculties and Conſtitutions. So that hence we may perceive, how prudently That was waved, and the Second here inſiſted on by St. *Paul* to the rude and ſimple Semi-barbarians of *Lycaonia*: *He left not himſelf without witneſs, in that he did good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitfull Seaſons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladneſs.* Which words we ſhall now interpret in a large and free Acceptation; ſo that this *Second* Theme may comprehend all the Brute Inanimate Matter

de Nat. Deor. lib. 2. *Quis hunc hominem dixerit, qui cum tam certos cæli motus, tam ratos aſtrorum ordines, &c.* Plutarch. de plac. phil. 1. 6. Θεῦ δ' ἔννοιαν ἔχον ἀπὸ τῶν φαινομένων ἀϛέρων, ὁρῶντες τάτας μεγάλης συμφωνίας ὄντας αἰτίους, καὶ τεταγμένας ἡμέρας τε καὶ νύκτα, χειμῶνά τε καὶ θέρος, ἀναπλάς τε καὶ δυσμάς.

Matter of the Univerſe, as the *Former* compriſed all viſible Creatures in the World, that have Underſtanding or Senſe or Vegetable Life. Theſe two Arguments are the Voices of Nature, the unanimous Suffrages of all real Beings and Subſtances created, that are naturally knowable without Revelation. And if, Laſtly, in the *Third* place, we can evince the Divine Exiſtence from the Adjuncts and Circumſtances of Human Life; if we find in all Ages, in all civilized Nations, an Univerſal Belief and Worſhip of a Divinity; if we find many unqueſtionable Records of Super-natural and Miraculous Effects; if we find many faithfull Relations of Prophecies punctually accompliſhed, of Prophecies ſo well atteſted, above the ſuſpicion of Falſhood, ſo remote and particular and unlikely to come to paſs, beyond the poſſibility of good Gueſſing or the mere Foreſight of Human Wiſdom; if we find a moſt warrantable tradition, that *at ſundry times and in divers manners God ſpake unto Mankind by his Prophets and by his Son and his Apoſtles*, who have deliver'd to us in Sacred Writings a clearer Revelation of his Divine Nature and Will: if, I ſay, this *Third* Topick from Human Teſtimony be found agreeable to the ſtanding Vote and Atteſtation of Nature, What further proofs can be demanded or deſired? what fuller evidence can our Adverſaries require, ſeeing all the Claſſes

Claſſes of known Beings are ſummoned to appear? Would they have us bring more Witneſſes, than the All of the World? and will they not ſtand to the grand Verdict and Determination of the Univerſe? They are incurable Infidels, that perſiſt to deny a Deity; when all Creatures in the World, as well ſpiritual as corporeal, all from Human Race to the loweſt of Inſects, from the Cedar of *Libanus* to the Moſs upon the Wall, from the vaſt Globes of the Sun and Planets to the ſmalleſt Particles of Duſt, do declare their abſolute dependance upon the firſt Author and Fountain of all Being and Motion and Life, the only Eternal and Self-exiſtent God; with whom inhabit all Majeſty and Wiſdom and Goodneſs for ever and ever.

But before I enter upon this Argument from the Origin and Frame of the World; it will not be amiſs to premiſe ſome Particulars, that may ſerve for an illuſtration of the Text, and be a proper Introduction to our Diſcourſe thereupon.

As the Apoſtles, *Barnabas* and *Paul*, were preaching the Goſpel at *Lyſtra* a City of *Lycaonia* in *Aſia* the Leſs, among the reſt of their Auditors there was a lame Cripple from his Birth, whom *Paul* commanded with a loud voice, To ſtand upright on his feet; and immediately by a miraculous Energy he leaped and walked. Let us compare the preſent Circumſtances Ver. 8.

cumſtances with thoſe of my former Text, and obſerve the remarkable difference in the Apoſtle's proceedings. No queſtion but there were ſeveral Cripples at *Athens*, ſo very large and populous a City; and if that could be dubious, I might add, that the very Climate diſpoſed the Inhabitants to impotency in the Feet. *Atthide tentantur greſſus, oculique in Achæis Finibus*---- are the words of *Lucretius*; which 'tis probable he tranſcribed from *Epicurus* a *Gargettian* and Native of *Athens*, and therefore an unqueſtionable Evidence in a matter of this nature. Neither is it likely, that all the *Athenian* Cripples ſhould
Ver. 17. eſcape the ſight of St. *Paul*; ſeeing *he diſputed there in the Market daily with them that met him.* How comes it to paſs then, that we do not hear of a like Miracle in that City; which one would think might have greatly conduced to the Apoſtle's deſign, and have converted, or at leaſt confuted and put to ſilence the *Epicureans* and *Stoicks*? But it is not difficult to give an account of this ſeeming Diſparity; if we attend to the Qualifications of the Lame perſon at *Lyſtra*: whom *Paul* ſtedfaſtly beholding, and
Ver. 9. *perceiving that he had* Faith *to be healed, ſaid with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet.* This is the neceſſary Condition, that was always required by
Luke 18. 42. our Saviour and his Apoſtles. *And Jeſus ſaid unto the blind man, Receive thy ſight, thy* Faith *hath ſaved thee*;

thee; and to the Woman that had the Iſſue of Blood, *Daughter, be of good comfort, thy* Faith *hath made thee whole, go in peace.* 8. 48. 'Twas want of *Faith* in our Saviour's Countrymen, which hindr'd him from ſhedding among them the ſalutary Emanations of his Divine Vertue: *And he did not many mighty works there, becauſe of their unbelief.* Matt. 13. 58. There were many diſeaſed perſons in his own Country, but very few that were rightly diſpoſed for a ſupernatural Cure. St. *Mark* hath a very obſervable Expreſſion upon the ſame occaſion: *And he could do no mighty work there, ſave that he laid his hands upon a few ſick folk, and healed them.* Καὶ οὐκ ἠδύνατο ἐκεῖ ἐν ὀλίγοις δύναμιν ποιῆσαι. Mark. 6. 5. We read in St. *Luke* 5. 17. *And the power* (δύναμις) *of the Lord was preſent to heal them.* And, chap. 6. v. 19. *And the whole multitude ſought to touch him: for there went vertue* (δύναμις) *out of him, and healed them all.* Seeing then that ἠδύνατο and δύναμις are words of the ſame Root and Signification; ſhall we ſo interpret the *Evangeliſt*, as if our Saviour had not *Power* to work Miracles among his unbelieving Countrymen? This is the paſſage, which that impious and impure Atheiſt *Lucilio Vanino* ſingled out for his Text in his pretended and mock Apology for the Chriſtian Religion; wickedly inſinuating, as if the Prodigies of Chriſt were mere Impoſtures and acted by Confederacy: and therefore where the *Vanini Dial.* p. 439

Spectators were incredulous, and conſequently watchfull and ſuſpicious, and not eaſily impoſed on, he *could* do no mighty Work there; there his **Arm** was ſhortned, and his Power and Vertue too feeble for ſuch ſupernatural Effects. But the groſs Abſurdity is no leſs conſpicuous, than the villainous Blaſphemy of this ſuggeſtion. For can it be credible to any rational perſon, that St. *Mark* could have that meaning? that he ſhould tax his Lord and Saviour, whom he knew to be God Almighty, with Deficiency of power? He *could* do no mighty Works; that is, he *would* do none, becauſe of their Unbelief. There's a frequent change of thoſe words in all Languages of the World. And we may appeal with St. *Chryſoſtom* to the common cuſtom of Speech, whatever Country we live in. This therefore is the genuine Sence of that expreſſion; Chriſt *would* not heal their infirmities, becauſe of the hardneſs and ſlowneſs of their Hearts, in that they believed him not. And I think there is not one inſtance in all the Hiſtory of the New Teſtament of a Miracle done for any ones ſake, that did not believe Jeſus to be a good perſon, and ſent from God; and had not a diſpoſition of Heart fit to receive his Doctrine. (For to believe he was the Meſſias and Son of God, was not then abſolutely neceſſary,

Τοῦτο δὲ χρὴ ἐν κοινῇ συνηθείᾳ φυλαττόμενον ἰδεῖν τίς ἂν. So δύναμαι is volo, *Acts* 4.20. *John* 7.7. *and* θέλω *is* poſſum. *Vid. Budæ Comm. L. Gr.*

See John *ch.* 9. *and* Matt. 16. 14.

ceſſary, nor rigidly exacted; the moſt Signal of the Prophecies being not yet fulfilled by him, till his Paſſion and Reſurrection.) So *Herod hoped* in vain *to have ſeen ſome Miracle done by him*: And when *the Phariſees ſought of him a ſign from Heaven, tempting him*; they received this diſappointing Anſwer, *Verily I ſay unto you, There ſhall no Sign be given to this generation.* And we may obſerve in the Goſpels, That where the Perſons themſelves were incapable of actual Faith; yet the Friends and Relations of thoſe Dead that were raiſed again to life, of thoſe Lunaticks and Demoniacks that were reſtored to their right minds, were ſuch as ſought after him and believed on him. And as to the healing of *Malchus's* Ear, it was a peculiar and extraordinary Caſe: For though the perſon was wholly unworthy of ſo gracious a Cure; yet in the account of the meek Lamb of God it was a kind of Injury done to him by the fervidneſs of St. *Peter*, who knew not yet what Spirit he was of, and that his Maſter's Kingdom was not of this World. But beſides this obvious meaning of the Words of the Evangeliſt, there may perhaps be a ſublimer Senſe couched under the Expreſſion. For in the Divine Nature *Will* and *Can* are frequently the ſelf-ſame thing; and Freedom and Neceſſity, that are oppoſites here below, do in Heaven above moſt amicably agree and joyn hands toge-

Luk. 23.8.

Mark 8.12.

Matt. 17. 15. 15. 22. Luke 8. 4.

Luke 22. 51.

ther. And this is not a Reſtraint, or Impotency; but the Royal Prerogative of the moſt abſolute King of Kings; that he *wills* to do nothing but what he *can*; and that he *can* do nothing which is repugnant to his divine Wiſdom and eſſential Goodneſs. God *cannot* do what is unjuſt, nor ſay what is untrue, nor promiſe with a mind to deceive. Our Saviour therefore *could* do no mighty Work in a Country of Unbelievers; becauſe it was not fit and reaſonable. And ſo we may ſay of our Apoſtle, who was acted by the Spirit of God; that he could do no Miracle at *Athens*, and that becauſe of their *Unbelief*. There is a very ſad and melancholy Account of the ſucceſs of his ſtay there. *Howbeit certain Men clave unto him and believed*; A more diminutive expreſſion, than if they had been called *a few*. And we do not find, that he ever viſited this City again, as he did ſeveral others, where there were a competent number of Diſciples. And indeed if we conſider the Genius and Condition of the *Athenians* at that time, How vitious and corrupt they were; how conceited of their own Wit and Science and Politeneſs, that They had invented Corn and Oil and diſtributed them to the World; that they firſt taught Civility, and Learning, and Religion, and Laws to the reſt of Mankind; how ſwoln and

Τινὲς δ' ἄνδρες, c. 17. v. 34.

Cicero pro Elacco. *Adſunt Athenienſes, unde humanitas, doctrina, religio, fruges, jura, leges orta atque in omnes terras diſtributa putantur.* Iſoc. Paneg. Diod. Sic. 13.

and puffed up with the fulſome Flatteries of Philoſophers and Sophiſts and Poets of the Stage: we cannot much wonder, that they ſhould ſo little regard an unknown Stranger, that preached unto them an unknown God.

I am aware of an Objection, That for ought we can now affirm, St. *Paul* might have done ſeveral Miracles at *Athens*, though they be not related by St. *Luke*. I confeſs I am far from aſſerting, That all the Miracles of our Saviour are recorded in the Goſpels, or of his Apoſtles in the Acts. But nevertheleſs, in the preſent Circumſtances, I think we may conjecture, That if any Prodigy and Wonder had been performed by our Apoſtle among thoſe curious and pragmatical *Athenians*; it would have had ſuch a conſequence, as might have deſerved ſome place in Sacred Hiſtory, as well as this before us at *Lyſtra*: where *when the people ſaw what Paul had done, they lift up their voices, ſaying in the ſpeech of Lycaonia, The Gods are come down to us in the likeneſs of men*: and the Prieſt came with Oxen and Garlands, and would have ſacrificed to them, as to *Jupiter* and *Mercurius*. That this was a common Opinion among the *Gentiles*, that the Gods ſometimes aſſumed Human ſhape, and converſed upon Earth as Strangers and Travellers, muſt needs be well known to any one, that ever looks into the ancient

See John 21.25. *and* 2 Cor. 12. 12.

Ver. 11.

ancient Poets. Even the Vagabond Life of *Apollonius Tyanenſis* ſhall be called by a bigotted Sophiſt, ἐπιδημία ἐς ἀνθρώπες Θεᾶ, a Peregrination of a God among Men. And when they ſay, διοικοῦντες ἀνθρώποις, *in the Shape of Men*, we muſt not ſo underſtand it, as if they believed, that the Gods had other Figure than Human even in Heaven it ſelf (for that was the received Doctrine of moſt of the Vulgar Heathen, and of ſome Sects of Philoſophers too,) but that They, who in their own Nature were of a more auguſt Stature and glorious Viſage had now contracted and debaſed themſelves into the narrower Dimenſions and meaner Aſpects of mortal Men. Now when the Apoſtles heard of this intended Sacrifice, *they rent their cloaths and ran in among the people, crying out*, &c. St. *Chryſoſtom* upon this place hath a very odd Expoſition. He enquires why *Paul* and *Barnabas* do now at laſt reprove the People, when the Prieſt and Victims were even at the Gates; and not preſently, when they lift up their Voice and called them Gods: for which he aſſigns this reaſon, That becauſe they ſpoke Λυκαονιϛὶ, *in the Lycaonian Tongue*, the Apoſtles did not then underſtand them: but now they perceived their meaning by the Oxen and the Garlands. Indeed it is very probable, that the *Lycaonian* Language

Eunapius, cap. 2.

Ver. 14.

Ἀλλ' ἐκ ἦν τοῦτο ἐλέπω δῆλον, τῇ δὲ οἰκείᾳ φωνῇ ἐφθέγγοντο· διὰ τοῦτο ἐδὲν αὐτοῖς ἔλεγον, ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἶδον τὰ σέμματα, τότε ἐξελθόντες διέῤῥηξαν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτ. Chryſ. ad loc.

was

was very different from the *Greek*: as we may conclude from *Ephorus* and *Strabo* that cites him, who make almoſt all the Nations of *Aſia Minor* to be *Barbarians*; and from *Stephanus Byzantius*, who acquaints us, that ἄζαινθος, a Juniper-tree, was called δέλβεια in the Speech of the *Lycaonians*, ἐν τῇ τῶν λυκαόνων φωνῇ. But notwithſtanding we can by no means allow that the great Apoſtle of the *Gentiles* ſhould be ignorant of that Language; he that ſo ſolemnly affirms of himſelf, *I thank my God, I ſpeak with Tongues more than you all.* And yet at the firſt Effuſion of this heavenly Gift, *the dwellers in Cappadocia, in Pontus and Aſia, Phrygia and Pamphylia* (ſome of them near Neighbours to the *Lycaonians*) *heard the Apoſtles ſpeak in their ſeveral Tongues the wonderfull Works of God.* And again, How could they have preached the Goſpel to the *Lyſtrians*, if they did not uſe the common Language of the Country? And to what purpoſe did they cry out and ſpeak to them, if the Hearers could not apprehend? or how could they by thoſe Sayings reſtrain the people from ſacrificing; if what they ſaid was not intelligible? But it will be asked, why then were the Apoſtles ſo ſlow and backward in reclaiming them? and what can be anſwer'd to the Query of St. *Chryſoſtom?* When I conſider the circumſtances and nature of this affair, I am perſuaded they did not hear that diſcourſe

Ephorus apud *Strab.* lib. 14.

Steph. voce Δέρβη.

1 Cor. 14. 18.

Acts 2.

Ver. 7.

Ver. 15.

Ver. 15.

discourse of the people. For I can hardly conceive, that Men under such apprehensions as the *Lystrians* then were, in the dread Presence and under the very Nod of the almighty *Jupiter*, not an Idol of Wood or Stone, but the real and very God (as the *Athenians* made their Complement to *Demetrius Poliorcetes*) should exclaim in his sight and hearing: this, I say, seems not probable nor natural; nor is it affirm'd in the Text: but they might buzz and whisper it one to another, and tacitly withdrawing from the presence of the Apostles, they then *lift up their voices* and noise it about the City. So that *Paul* and *Barnabas* are but just then inform'd of their idolatrous design, when they rent their Cloaths, and run in among them, and expostulate with them; *Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of like passions with you* (ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ὑμῖν, *Mortal* men like your selves, as it is judiciously render'd in the ancient Latin Version, otherwise the *Antithesis* is not so plain: For the Heathen Theology made even the Gods themselves subject to human passions and appetites, to Anger, Sorrow, Lust, Hunger, Wounds, Lameness, &c. and exempted them from nothing but Death and Old Age) *and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities* (*i. e.* Idols) *unto the Living God, which made Heaven and Earth and the Sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered*

Οὐξύλινον, ἐδὲ λίθινόν ἀλλ' ἀληθινόν. Athenæus, 6, 15.

Ὅδε ἤ τις εἶπασκεν ἰδὼν ἐς πλησίον ἄλλον.

Ver. 15.

Mortales sumus similes vobis homines.

So Εἰ τε πιθοῦ, *If I die*, a common Expression in Gr. Writers.

Αἴ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὡς εἶλω ἀθανάτοις καὶ ἀγήρως & ἤματα πάντα. Hom.

ed all Nations to walk in their own ways: Πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, not *all Nations*, but *all the Heathen* (the word Heathen comes from ἔθνη) *all the Gentiles*, diſtinguiſhed from the Jews, as the ſame words are tranſlated *Rom.* 15. 11. and 2 *Tim.* 4. 17. and ought to have been ſo, *Rom.* 1. 5. and 16. 26. but much more in our Text, which according to the preſent Verſion ſeems to carry a very obſcure, if not erroneous meaning; but by a true interpretation is very eaſie and intelligible; That hitherto God had ſuffer'd all the Gentiles to walk in their own ways; and excepting the Jews only, whom he choſe for his own people and preſcribed them a Law, he permitted the reſt of Mankind to walk by the mere light of Nature without the aſſiſtance of Revelation: but that now in the fulneſs of time he had even to the Gentiles alſo *ſent ſalvation* and *opened the door of faith*, and *granted repentance unto life*. So that theſe words of our Apoſtle are exactly co-incident with that ſo much controverted paſſage in his diſcourſe to the *Athenians*: *And the* (paſt) *times of this ignorance* (of the Gentile World) *God winked at* (or overlook'd:) *but now commandeth all men every where to repent.* And *nevertheleſs* even in that gloomy ſtate of Heatheniſm, *he left not himſelf without witneſs, in that he did good* ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐξ οὐρανῦ, always *doing good from Heaven*, which ſeems to be the genuine punctuation, and

See Acts 4. 27. 14. 5. 26. 17. Gal. 2. 14.

Acts 17. 30. ὑπεριδὼν.

כד עבד הוא להון טבתא
מן שמיא ומחות מטרא ·

So that they read ἀγαθὰ ἔργα, καὶ ὑετὸν δ. Horat. *Nec ſiquid miri faciat natura, Deos id Triſtes ex alto cæli demittere tecto.*

is authorized by the Syriack Interpreters) *and gave us Rain from Heaven and fruitfull Seaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs.* Even the Gentiles might feel after him and find him; ſeeing that the admirable frame of *Heaven and Earth and Sea,* and the munificent proviſion of *food* and ſuſtenance for his Creatures did competently ſet forth his Eternal Power and Godhead; ſo that (ſtupid Idolaters and) prophane Atheiſts were then and always without excuſe: which is the ſcope of theſe Diſcourſes.

Our Adverſaries have uſed the ſame methods to elude the preſent Argument from the Frame of the World, as they have done to evade the former from the Origin of Mankind. *Some* have maintain'd, That this World hath thus exiſted from all Eternity in its preſent form and condition: but *Others* do as ſtifly affirm, That the Forms of particular Worlds are generable and corruptible; ſo that our preſent Syſtem cannot have ſuſtain'd an infinite Duration already gone and expired: but however that Body in general, the common *Baſis* and Matter of all Worlds and Beings, is ſelf-exiſtent and eternal; which being naturally divided into innumerable little particles or atoms, eternally endued with an ingenit and inſeparable power of Motion, by their

their omnifarious concurſions and combinations and coalitions, there emergeth ſucceſſively (or at once, if Matter be infinite) an infinite number of Worlds; and among the reſt aroſe this viſible complex Syſtem of Heaven and Earth: and thus far they do agree, but then they differ about the cauſe and mode of the production of Worlds, ſome aſcribing it to Fortune, and others to Mechaniſm or Nature. Indeed as for the Aſtrological Atheiſts, they will give us no trouble in the preſent diſpute; becauſe they cannot from a peculiar *Hypotheſis* here, as they have done before about the Origination of Animals. For though ſome of them are ſo vain and ſenceleſs, as to pretend to a *Thema Mundi*, a calculated Scheme of the Nativity of our World: yet it exceeds even their abſurdity to ſuppoſe the Zodiack and Planets to be efficient of, and antecedent to themſelves; or to exert any influences, before they were in Being. So that to refute all poſſible Explications that the Atheiſts have or can propoſe, I ſhall proceed in this following method.

I. Firſt, I will prove it impoſſible that the primary Parts of our World, the Sun and the Planets with their regular Motions and Revolutions, ſhould have ſubſiſted eternally in the preſent or *a like* Frame and Condition.

II. Secondly, I will ſhew, That Matter abſtractly and abſolutely conſider'd, cannot have born an Infinite Duration now paſt and expired; as alſo that Motion cannot have coexiſted Eternally, as an inherent Property and eſſential Attribute of the Atheiſt's God, Matter.

III. Thirdly, That, though we allow them, that Univerſal Matter hath endured from everlaſting, divided into infinite Particles in the *Epicurean* way, and that Motion hath been coæval and coeternal with it: yet theſe Particles or Atoms could never of themſelves, by omnifarious kinds of Motion, whether fortuitous or Mechanical, have fallen or been diſpoſed into this or *a like* viſible Syſtem; though a ſuppoſed infinite Duration of the Atoms and their Motions ſhould already be expired and gone.

IV. And Fourthly, *à poſteriori*, That the Order and Beauty of the Inanimate Parts of the World, the diſcernible Ends and Final Cauſes of them, the τὸ Βελτίον, or a Meliority above what was neceſſary to be, do evince by a reflex Argument, That it is the Product and Workmanſhip, not of blind Mechaniſm or blinder Chance; but of an intelligent and benign Agent, *who by his excellent Wiſdom made the Heavens and Earth: and gives Rains and fruitfull Seaſons for the ſervice of Man.*

I. And

I. And Firſt, That the preſent or *a like* Frame of the World hath not ſubſiſted from Everlaſting. We will readily concede, that a thing may be truly Eternal, though its Duration be terminated at one End. For ſo we affirm Human Souls to be Immortal and Eternal, though ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦσαν, there was a time when they were Nothing; and therefore their Infinite Duration will always be bounded at one Extreme by that firſt beginning of Exiſtence. So that, for ought appears as yet; the Revolutions of the Earth and other Planets about the Sun, though they be limited at one end by the preſent Revolution, may nevertheleſs have been Infinite and Eternal without any beginning. But then we muſt conſider, that this Duration of Human Souls is only *potentially* Infinite: for Their Eternity conſiſts only in an endleſs capacity of Continuance without ever ceaſing to be, in a boundleſs Futurity that can never be exhauſted, or all of it be paſt and preſent: But their Duration can never be *poſitively* and *actually* Eternal; becauſe it is moſt manifeſt, that no Moment can ever be aſſigned, wherein it ſhall be true, that ſuch a Soul hath then actually ſuſtain'd an Infinite Duration. For that ſuppoſed Infinite Duration will by the very Suppoſition be limited at two extremes, though never ſo remote aſunder;

ſunder; and conſequently muſt needs be Finite. Wherefore the true Nature and Notion of a Soul's Eternity is this: That the future moments of its Duration can never be all *paſt and preſent*; but ſtill there will be a Futurity and Potentiality of more for ever and ever. So that we evidently perceive, from this inſtance of a Soul, That what-ever ſucceſſive Duration, ſhall be bounded at one end, and be all *paſt and preſent*, muſt come infinitely ſhort of Infinity. Which neceſſarily evinceth, That the preſent or *a like* World can never have been Eternal; or that there cannot have been Infinite paſt Revolutions of a Planet about a Sun. For this ſuppoſed Infinity is terminated at one extreme by the preſent Revolution, and all the other Revolutions are confeſſedly paſt; ſo that the whole Duration is bounded at one end, and all *paſt and preſent*; and therefore cannot have been Infinite, by what was proved before. And this will ſhew us the vaſt difference between the falſe ſucceſſive Eternity backwards, and the real one to come. For, conſider the preſent Revolution of the Earth, as the Bound and Confine of them both. God Almighty, if he ſo pleaſeth, may continue this Motion to perpetuity in Infinite Revolutions to come: becauſe Futurity is inexhauſtible, and can never be all ſpent and run out by *paſt and preſent* moments. But then, if

we

we look backwards from this preſent Revolution, we do apprehend the impoſſibility of infinite Revolutions on that ſide: becauſe all are already *paſt*, and ſo were once actually *preſent*, and conſequently are finite, by the argument before. For ſurely we cannot conceive a Præteritneſs (if I may ſay ſo) ſtill backwards *in infinitum*, that never was preſent: as we can an endleſs futurity, that never will be preſent. So that though one is potentially infinite; yet nevertheleſs the other is poſitively finite. And though this Reaſoning doth neceſſarily conclude againſt the paſt infinite duration of all ſucceſſive Motion and mutable Beings; yet it doth not at all affect the eternal Exiſtence of the adorable Divinity, in whoſe invariable nature there is no Paſt nor Future; who is omnipreſent not only as to Space, but as to Duration; and with reſpect to ſuch Omnipreſence it is certain and manifeſt, that Succeſſion and Motion are mere impoſſibilities and repugnant in the very terms.

And *Secondly*, though what hath been now ſaid, hath given us ſo clear a view of the nature of ſucceſſive Duration, as to make more Arguments needleſs: yet I ſhall here briefly ſhew, how our Adverſaries *Hypotheſis* doth without any outward oppoſition deſtroy and confute it ſelf. For let us ſuppoſe infinite Revolutions of the Earth about the Sun to be already

already gone and expired: I take it to be ſelf-evident; that, if None of thoſe paſt Revolutions has been infinite ages ago, all the Revolutions put together cannot make up the duration of infinite ages. It follows therefore from this ſuppoſition, that there may be ſome one aſſignable Revolution among them, that is at an infinite diſtance from the preſent. But it is ſelf-evident likewiſe, that no one paſt Revolution can be infinitely diſtant from the preſent: for then an infinite or unbounded Duration may be bounded at two extremes by two Annual Revolutions; which is abſurd and a contradiction. And *again*, upon the ſame ſuppoſition of an eternal paſt Duration of the World, and of infinite Annual Revolutions of the Earth about the Sun; I would ask concerning the Monthly Revolutions of the Moon about the Earth, or the diurnal ones of the Earth upon its one Axis, both which by the very *Hypotheſis* are coæval with the former; whether theſe alſo have been finite or infinite? Not finite to be ſure; becauſe then a finite number would be greater than an infinite, as 12 or 365 are more than an Unit. Nor infinite neither; for then two or three Infinites would exceed one another: as a Year exceeds a Month, or both exceed a Day. So that both ways the Suppoſition is repugnant and impoſſible.

And

And *Thirdly*, the Arguments already uſed, from the gradual Increaſe of Mankind, from the known Plantations of moſt Countries, from the recent Invention of Letters and Arts, *&c.* do conclude as forcibly againſt the Eternity of the World, as againſt infinite Generations of Human Race. For if the preſent Frame of the Earth be ſuppoſed eternal; by the ſame notion they make Mankind to have been coeternal with it. For otherwiſe this eternal Earth, after ſhe had been eternally barren and deſolate, muſt at laſt have ſpontaneouſly produced Mankind, without new cauſe from without, or any alteration in her own texture: which is ſo groſs an abſurdity, that even no Atheiſt hath yet affirmed it. So that it evidently follows, that if Mankind had a beginning; the preſent Form of the Earth, and therefore the whole Syſtem of the World had a beginning alſo. Serm. III.

Which being proved and eſtabliſhed; we are now enabled to give anſwers to ſome bold Queries and Objections of Atheiſts; That ſeeing God is deſcribed as a Being infinitely powerfull and perfectly good; and that theſe Attributes were eſſential to him from all Eternity; why did not he by his Power for the more ample communication of his Goodneſs create the World eternally, if he created it at all? or at leaſt, many Millions of Ages ago before

this ſhort ſpan of duration of five or ſix thouſand Years? To the firſt we reply, That, ſeeing we have diſcover'd an intrinſecal and natural impoſſibility, that a ſucceſſive Duration ſhould be actually eternal; it is no leſs than a contradiction to it ſelf, that the World ſhould be created from everlaſting: and therefore it is no affront to the Divine Omnipotence, if by reaſon of the formal incapacity and repugnancy of the thing, we averr that the World could not poſſibly have been made from all Eternity, even by God himſelf. Which gives an anſwer to the ſecond Queſtion, why created ſo lately? For if it be impoſſible to have been created eternally; there can no inſtant be aſſigned for its Creation in Time, though never ſo many Myriads and Millions of years ſince, but the ſame Query might be put, Why but now, and Why ſo late? For even before that remoter period God was eternally exiſtent, and might have made the World as many Myriads of Ages ſtill backwards before That: and conſequently this Objection is abſurd and unreaſonable. For elſe if it was good and allowable, it would eternally hinder God from exerting his Creative Power: becauſe he could never make a World ſo early, at any given Moment; but it might truly be ſaid he could have created it ſooner. Or if they think that there may be a Sooneſt Inſtant of

poſſible

poſſible Creation: yet ſeeing that all Inſtants have an equal pretence to it in humane apprehenſion, why may not this recent production of the World, according to Sacred Authority, be ſuppoſed to be that Sooneſt? at leaſt it may make that Claim to it, that cannot be baffled by ſuch Arguments, as equally conclude againſt all Claims, againſt any conceivable Beginning of the World.

And ſo when they profanely ask, Why did not this ſuppoſed Deity, if he really made the Heavens, make them boundleſs and immenſe, a fit and honourable Manſion for an infinite and incomprehenſible Being? or at leaſt vaſtly more ample and magnificent, than this narrow Cottage of a World? we may make them this anſwer; Firſt, that it is impoſſible and a contradiction, that a created World ſhould be immenſe; becauſe it is the nature of Space and Motion; that they can never be actually and poſitively infinite: they have a power only and a capacity of being increaſed without end; ſo that no Space can be aſſigned ſo vaſt, but ſtill a larger may be imagin'd; no Motion ſo ſwift or languid, but a greater Velocity or Slowneſs may ſtill be conceived; no poſitive Duration of it ſo long, than which a more laſting may not be ſuppoſed. From whence ſecondly it follows; that, though the World was a million of times more ſpacious

and ample, than even Aſtronomy ſuppoſes it; or yet another million bigger than that, and ſo on in infinite progreſſion; yet ſtill they might make the ſame Exception world without end. For ſeeing that God Almighty can do all that is poſſible; and Space hath always a poſſibility of being enlarged indefinitely: he could never create ſo ample a World, but ſtill it would be true, that he could have made a bigger; the fœcundity of his Creative Power never growing barren nor being exhauſted. Now what might always be an exception againſt all poſſible Worlds, can never be a juſt one againſt any whatſoever.

And when they ſcoffingly demand, Why would this imaginary Omnipotence make ſuch mean pieces of Workmanſhip? what an indigent and impotent thing is his principal Creature Man? would not boundleſs Beneficence have communicated his divine Perfections in the moſt eminent degrees? they may receive this reply, That we are far from ſuch arrogance, as to pretend to the higheſt dignity, and be the chief of the whole Creation; we believe an inviſible World and a Scale of Spiritual Beings all nobler than our ſelves: nor yet are we ſo low and baſe as the Atheiſm would depreſs us; not walking Statues of Clay, not the Sons of brute Earth, whoſe final Inheritance is Death and Corruption;

Corruption; we carry the image of God in us, a rational and immortal Soul; and though we be now miſerable and feeble, yet we aſpire after eternal happineſs, and firmly expect a great exaltation of all our natural powers. But farther, we affirm, That whatſoever was or can be made, whether *Angels or Archangels, Cherubims or Seraphims*, whether *Thrones or Dominions or Principalities or Powers*, all the glorious Hoſt of Heaven, muſt needs be finite and imperfect and dependant Creatures: and God out of the *exceeding greatneſs of his power* is ſtill able, without end, to create higher Claſſes of Beings. For where can we put a ſtop to the Efficacy of the Almighty? or what can we aſſign for the Higheſt of all poſſible finite Perfections? There can be no ſuch thing or notion, as an *almoſt Infinite*: there can be nothing Next or Second to an omnipotent God: *Nec viget quicquam ſimile aut ſecundum*; as the Heathen Poet ſaid excellently well of the ſuppoſed Father of Gods and Men. The infinite Diſtance between the Creator and the nobleſt of all Creatures can never be meaſured nor exhauſted by endleſs addition of finite degrees. So that no actual Creature can ever be the moſt perfect of all poſſible Creation. Which ſhews the folly of this Query, that might always be demanded, let things be as they will; that would impiouſly and abſurdly attempt

Horat. Car. I. 12.

attempt to tie the Arm of Omnipotence from doing any thing at all, becauſe it can never do its Utmoſt.

II. I proceed now to the Second Propoſition, That neither Matter univerſally and abſtractly conſider'd, nor Motion can have endured a paſt Eternity. And to this I ſhall ſpeak the more briefly; not only becauſe it is an abſtruſe and metaphyſical Speculation; but alſo of far leſs moment and conſequence to us than the others: ſeeing that without this we can evince the Exiſtence of God from the Origin and Frame of the Univerſe. For if the preſent or a like Syſtem of the World cannot poſſibly have been eternal, by the firſt Propoſition; and if without God it could neither naturally nor fortuitouſly emerge out of a Chaos, by the third Propoſition; we muſt neceſſarily have recourſe to a Deity, as the Contriver and Maker of Heaven and Earth; whether we ſuppoſe he created them out of Nothing, or had the Materials ready eternally to his hand. But nevertheleſs, becauſe we are verily perſuaded of the truth of this Article, we ſhall briefly aſſign ſome reaſons of our Belief in theſe following Particulars.

Firſt, It is no Contradiction, that Matter ſhould be produced out of Nothing. It is urged as an Univerſal

Univerſal Maxim; that nothing can proceed from Nothing. Now this we readily allow; and yet it will prove nothing againſt the Poſſibility of Creation. For when they ſay, Nothing from Nothing; they muſt ſo underſtand it, as excluding all Cauſes, both material and efficient. In which ſence it is moſt evidently and infallibly true: being equivalent to this propoſition; that nothing can make it ſelf, or, Nothing cannot bring its no-ſelf out of non-entity into Something. Which only proves thus much, That Matter did not produce it ſelf, or that all Subſtances did not emerge out of an Univerſal Nothing. Now who-ever talked at that rate? We do not create the World from Nothing and by Nothing; we aſſert an eternal God to have been the Efficient Cauſe of it. So that a Creation of the World out of Nothing by Something; and by that Something, that includes in its Nature a neceſſary Exiſtence and perfection of Power; is certainly no Contradiction; nor oppoſes that common Maxim. Whence it manifeſtly follows, That ſeeing God may do any thing, that implies not a Contradiction; if there be ſuch an Eſſence as God, he *may* have created Matter out of nothing, or given That an Exiſtence, that had no Being before.

Secondly,

Secondly, Some Things have been *actually* cre-
Serm. II. ated out of Nothing. In a former Diſcourſe we have proved ſufficiently, that Human Souls are not mere modification of Matter, but real and ſpiritual Subſtances, that have as true an Exiſtence, as our very Bodies themſelves. Now no man in his wits can ſeriouſly think, that his own Soul hath exiſted from all Eternity; not the Stuff or Matter of it, for it is no compound Being; not the perſonality of it, as I appeal to Common Senſe; and if a man could believe, that his perſonal Soul hath been from everlaſting, ſuch an Opinion would be as deſtructive to Atheiſm, as to concede the contrary now. So that the ſpiritual Souls of Men have confeſſedly been produced out of Nothing. But if God hath *actually* created thoſe intelligent Subſtances, that have ſuch Nobility and Excellency above brute ſenſeleſs Matter; 'tis pervicaciouſneſs to deny, that he created Matter alſo: unleſs neceſſary Exiſtence be included in the very Eſſence and Idea of Matter.

Thirdly, Matter doth not include in its Nature a neceſſity of Exiſtence. Human Souls, as is proved before, have been actually created, and conſequently have not neceſſary Exiſtence included in their Eſſence. Now can I believe, that my ſpiritual Soul, that underſtands and judges and invents, *&c.* hath

hath notwithſtanding a dependent and precarious Being; while the Particles of this dead Ink and Paper have been neceſſarily eternal and uncreate? 'Tis againſt natural reaſon; and no one while he contemplates an individual Body, can diſcern ſuch a neceſſity. But men have been taught to believe, that Extenſion or Space, and Body are the ſelf-ſame thing: ſo that becauſe they cannot imagine, how Space can either begin or ceaſe to exiſt; they preſently conclude, that extended infinite Matter muſt needs eternally have a Being. But I ſhall fully prove hereafter, that Body and Space or Diſtance are quite different things, and that a Vacuity is interſperſed among the Particles of Matter, and ſuch a one as hath a vaſtly larger Extenſion, than all the Matter of the Univerſe. Which now being ſuppoſed; they muſt abſtract their Imagination from that falſe infinite Extenſion, and conceive one Particle of Matter ſurrounded on all ſides with vacuity, and contiguous to no other Body. So that all other Matter is divided and diſtinct from it, by the very ſuppoſition. And hence it appears, that whereas formerly they fanſied an immenſe boundleſs Space, as an homogeneous One; which great Individual they believed might deſerve the Attribute of neceſſary Exiſtence: Now the whole Queſtion is about one ſolitary Atom, that hath no Serm. VII.

dependence on the reſt of the World; and is no more ſuſtained in Being by other Matter, than it could be created by it; whether this poor Atom, ſluggiſh and unactive as it is, doth involve Neceſſity of Exiſtence (the firſt and higheſt of all perfections) in its particular nature and notion? I dare preſume for the Negative in the judgments of all ſerious men. And I obſerve the *Epicureans* take much pains to convince us, that in natural corruptions and diſſolutions, Atoms are not reduced to Nothing; which ſurely would be needleſs, if the very Idea of Atoms imported Self-exiſtence. And yet if one Atom do not include ſo much in its Notion and Eſſence; all Atoms put together, that is, all the Matter of the Univerſe does not include it. So that upon the whole matter, ſeeing that Creation is no contradiction, that God hath certainly created nobler Subſtances than Matter, and that Matter is not neceſſarily eternal; it is moſt reaſonable to believe, that the eternal and Self-exiſtent God created the material World alſo, and produced it out of Nothing.

Lucret. *lib.* 1.

And Fourthly, it will be allowed as true, by all thoſe that can reach theſe Speculations; That whatſoever hath not neceſſarily an eternal ſelf-exiſtence included in its very Nature and Definition, (which we have proved Matter hath not) cannot have been

been *actually* ſelf-exiſtent from Eternity: ſo that finally, there is not only a great inducement from its probability and reaſonableneſs, but a downright Neceſſity of admitting the Creation of the World.

And then Fifthly, as to Motion, that we may wave ſome Metaphyſical Arguments, which demonſtrate that Local Motion cannot be poſitively eternal; we ſhall only obſerve in two Words; That if Matter be not eſſentially eternal, as we have ſhewed before; much leſs can Motion be, that is but the adjunct and accident of it. Nay though we ſhould concede an Eternity to Matter; yet why muſt Motion be coæval with it? which is not only not inherent and eſſential to Matter, but may be produced and deſtroyed at the pleaſure of free Agents: both which are flatly repugnant to an eternal and neceſſary Duration. I am aware, how ſome have aſſerted that the ſame quantity of Motion is always kept up in the World; which may ſeem to favour the Opinion of its infinite Duration: but that fancy doth ſolely depend upon an abſolute *Plenum*; which being refuted in my next, it will then appear how abſurd and falſe that conceit is, how eaſily diſproved from the Motive power of Souls embodied, and the gradual increaſe

creaſe of Men and other Animals, and many Arguments beſides. Therefore let this alſo be concluded, That Motion cannot have ſubſiſted in an infinite paſt Duration: Which was the thing to be proved.

FINIS.